

## Book Review

*In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology*

**Amos Yong**

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 377 pages

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In his 2005 book, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, Amos Yong boldly proclaimed that Pentecostal theology could make a contribution to the global context.<sup>1</sup> Now, in his newest work, Yong applies this thesis particularly to political theology. What does Pentecostalism bring to the public sphere of society, economics, and government? Yong argues that a single Pentecostal approach to the political does not exist. Rather, just as the quintessential Pentecostal text exclaims that the Spirit empowered those on the Day of Pentecost to speak in various tongues (Acts 2:4), a Pentecostal theology of the political will allow for a variety of Spirit-inspired approaches in the public domain. Yong encapsulates this diversity with the slogan, “Many tongues, many political practices.”<sup>2</sup>

In developing his thesis, Yong begins by describing global Pentecostalism’s current interaction with the public sphere. He uncovers a full-range of Pentecostal postures toward politics, economics, and culture. While some Pentecostals exhibit political quiescence, others participate fully in electoral, economic, and socio-cultural structures, and still others speak prophetically to these structures by forming counter-cultural communities.

Yong then situates these multiple Pentecostal forms of political engagement in the context of historical Christian political

theology. In an analysis that includes the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, Augustine’s two cities, Luther’s two spheres, and Calvin’s “clerocracy,”<sup>3</sup> as well as the establishment of the discipline of political theology through the works of twentieth-century theologians such as Carl Schmitt and Johann Baptist Metz, Yong finds that both the Bible and Christian tradition provide numerous political theological options in various contexts. Thus, “there is no single normative political theological stance.” Rather, Christian political engagement constitutes a “context-specific affair.”<sup>4</sup>

Emboldened by his description of current Pentecostal practices and his survey of a varied Christian theo-political tradition, Yong claims that Pentecostalism can make a distinct contribution to the larger Christian discussion of political theology. By “starting with the Spirit,” a Pentecostal political theology appreciates a diversity of voices as it preserves the many tongues of the Day of Pentecost.<sup>5</sup> Pentecostalism’s ““this is that’ hermeneutic” understands contemporary Christian experience to exist in continuity with the Early Church. As a result, Yong suggests that Pentecostalism exhibits portability and translatability. Pentecostals adapt easily to various languages, customs, and experiences, yet still find a common source for theological inquiry in Luke-Acts, the Pentecostal “canon-within-a-canon.”

With this core interpretative context established, Yong delineates trajectories for Pentecostal political theology.

As a basic framework for developing Pentecostal political theological trajectories, Yong utilizes the fivefold gospel of Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, Healer, and Coming King.

As Savior, Jesus provides not only forgiveness of sins, but also deliverance from principalities and powers; this Pentecostal reality encourages what Yong refers to as a “cosmopolitical liturgics of resistance,” in which Christian worship orients the church toward a proper perspective on the political domain as God receives enthronement above every other power.

Jesus, the Sanctifier, both purifies Pentecostals from sin and consecrates them for service; thus, Yong posits, Pentecostal politics includes a rejection of and challenge to the culture, while also working toward its redemption.

As Spirit-baptizer, Jesus empowers believers to witness and emboldens them to confront God-opposed powers; therefore, Pentecostal political theology speaks prophetically in the public domain through a variety of Spirit-inspired acts.

Jesus, as Healer, represents a concept that evolved to include the physical, emotional, mental, and socio-material domains in response to the Latter Rain revival, charismatic renewal, and “word-faith” movement; as a result, Yong advocates a Pentecostal politics that aims to bring wholeness to human lives by shaping just communities in anticipation of the coming Kingdom of God.

Finally, Jesus, the Coming King, has developed into a dispensational, escapist, and apocalyptic mentality in Pentecostalism; however, Yong challenges these ideas with an “eschatological theology of the political,” which affirms that “the Christian hope ... is not merely about a future restoration, but about the present gift of the Spirit who draws us into the history of Jesus wherein we meet the God who is to come.”<sup>6</sup>

As has already become clear, Yong has a breathtaking scope. He not only provides a cogent analysis of the political theology tradition itself, but also explains Pentecostal history, theology, and practice with reference to an extensive variety of Spirit-filled individuals and movements from around the globe. In addition, Yong brings Pentecostal politics into conversation with a host of contemporary non-Pentecostal voices within political theology. As if that were not enough, he explicates each topic by examining relevant passages in Luke-Acts. Though such an approach could seem overwhelming, Yong successfully ties together his Pentecostal, dialogical, and biblical considerations to bring forth a theological underpinning for Pentecostal engagement with the public domain that keeps his thesis of “many tongues, many political practices” in tact.

Yong’s work will challenge many potential audiences. He will force Pentecostals to reformulate their political understandings out of their own “pneumatological imagination.”<sup>7</sup> At the same time, he may draw the ire of some Pentecostals for his questioning of entrenched Pentecostal beliefs, specifically in the area of eschatology. Political theologians outside of Pentecostalism will benefit by coming to terms with potential Pentecostal contributions to thinking about social, political, and economic engagement.

Hopefully, Pentecostal liberal arts colleges (especially programs such as government, political science, and economics) as well as Pentecostal seminaries will utilize the text to stimulate Spirit-filled insights among students.

Pentecostalism exists as a multinational and multiethnic phenomenon. With all of its variety and complexity, few theologians could successfully integrate practices and insights from around the world to form coherent Pentecostal trajectories for political theology, but Amos Yong could, and he did.

With an approach both sympathetic of and challenging to Pentecostal belief and practice, Yong has produced a multi-disciplinary work that will energize theological reflection about the political among both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals.

Individuals looking for easy solutions will not find them. As usual, instead of answering questions, Yong generates more and leaves it for others to further explore the trajectories he has established.

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<sup>1</sup>Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>2</sup>Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 109.

<sup>3</sup>Yong, *Days of Caesar*, 66, defines “clerocracy” as “a government deeply informed by ecclesial leadership.”

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 91-95.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 353.

<sup>7</sup>Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, JPT Supplement Series, 20 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 102, uses the term “pneumatological imagination” to refer to “a way of seeing God, self and world that is inspired by the Pentecostal-charismatic experience of the Spirit.”